

# Top 10 Bomb Threat Response Tips for Colleges and Universities



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**B**omb threat response protocols have been put in place by colleges and universities, and many of these protocols are based on published police and federal guidelines that have been created nearly a decade ago. In light of the recent influx in bomb threats across the country, colleges and universities should review their response protocols and adjust to technological developments and the evolving nature of threat.

- 1) Keep plans and protocols confidential** and only share with the relevant entities; many schools post their response plans on various outlets, thus providing a potential aggressor with vital information to conduct an attack on the school utilizing its own plans to their advantage.
- 2) Customize general plans to your specific location** as a potential aggressor can read the same published law enforcement and Federal plans as the schools and religious centers. Add and customize your plans for your organization taking into consideration layout, natural and man-made barriers, neighboring entities and more.
- 3) Break the routine:** Always define primary and secondary evacuation locations, rotate between them in training

and actual response.

- 4) Utilize technology to speed up and effectively evacuate your location;** the amount of transmitted energy including cell, Wi-Fi, radio and more is so great in the urban setting that utilization of additional technological information transmitting devices has a low probability of activating an explosive device. In general terms and counter to common belief, in many cases the speed of evacuation should supersede the risk of accidentally triggering an IED (Improvised Explosive Device). Consider purchasing a satellite phone in case after an evacuation as the cellular system can collapse.
- 5) Implement NIMS (National Incident Management System) and ICS (Incident Command System) principles** with your team; this system ensures effective management and decision making, and you will speak the language of potential first responders.
- 6) Train your team and practice under various circumstances** – bomb threats and suspicious devices can happen at any time. Make sure you are capable of an effective evacuation under fluctuating staffing levels, occupancy levels and available managers.
- 7) Provide relevant information to your team:** All employees can potentially receive or identify a suspicious object. Make sure they are all familiar with mail

or package suspicious signs and keep a bomb threat call sheet under their keyboard (see a few recommended links at the end of this article).

- 8) Create a Crisis Response Team.** Your team should meet once a month, review various response protocols, train on various scenarios and build a cohesiveness and ownership that will ensure a proactive and effective is available on location to response to a variety of emergencies. Crisis Response is an inherent part to your mission as an education or religious center.
- 9) Create a Crisis Response Team bag.** This should include in it a list of building occupants, blueprints and the layout of the building, a bullhorn, whistles, caution tape, high visibility vest, medical/trauma kit, games or candy for children, pens and paper. In addition to the bag, get a coded and encrypted flash memory card and keep a list of occupants, blueprints and layout of the building. Be certain that one or more of your team always carries the flash memory card and, in an emergency, provide information to first responders as most have a laptop in their service vehicle.
- 10) Form relationships with nearby entities** as mutual support is helpful in case of emergency. In some cases you can evacuate into a nearby secure building rather than keep your population exposed to a potential aggressor or the element. However, make certain that you do not follow a single pattern of responses to these incidents.

The “Top 10 Bomb Threat Tips” above are items for consideration based on over 25 years of experience in the field. Colleges and universities should consider these recommendations based on their unique layout, location, climate and more. Though challenging at first, I can assure you that a proactive and pragmatic approach to safety and security will inevitably be accepted and appreciated by the community you serve.

Suspicious signs and Safe Mail handling – see for example <https://about.usps.com/securing-the-mail/suspicious-mail.htm> or <http://www.osec.doc.gov/osy/PDF/SafeMailing.pdf>

Bomb threat call procedures – see the below for an example [https://emilms.fema.gov/is906/assets/ocso-bomb\\_threat\\_samepage-brochure.pdf](https://emilms.fema.gov/is906/assets/ocso-bomb_threat_samepage-brochure.pdf) **S**